

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION

Public Health - Seattle & King County has a clear, simple, and bold vision: “healthy people and healthy communities.” To that end, Public Health is committed to aggressively protecting and promoting the health of this region, in a manner that is accountable both to the communities served and the governmental bodies that determine resource allocation.

During the past four years, Public Health has been committed to improved public health practice and improved business practice. The focus has been on developing integrative strategies that thoughtfully assess and incrementally improve organizational functioning.

We have had some success. We also have remaining challenges. We believe that the tax paying public deserves accountability. We have designed a process and are promoting systems that organize programs and services around measurable outcomes. Similarly, business planning efforts undertaken in recent years (and reflected in this document) stress increasing accountability.

In 1995, Public Health - Seattle & King County reorganized its Divisional/Regional structure and renegotiated its inter-local agreement. This put into place a framework for continued and increased focus on accountability, consolidated programs and services, and improved management systems as reflected in the text of this document and its appendices.

Public Health has made significant progress in addressing its mission of achieving and sustaining healthy people and healthy communities. For example, HIV rates are among the lowest in the nation; tuberculosis rates are being held in check in a volatile demographically-changing climate;

infant mortality rates are declining, and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified Public Health - Seattle & King County as having the best immunization rates for children among all urban centers. Nonetheless, there is much more to do.

Emerging disease control problems and specific health disparities in our communities continue to stress and stretch public health resources. These issues will require policy and budget responses from City and County elected officials and the King County Board of Health.

For the next five years, Public Health’s priorities will be:

- Health and wellness promotion
- Addressing the increasing rates of chronic disease
- Infectious disease control
- Addressing health care needs of high risk, low-income people, and/or un- or underinsured people, many of whom do not speak English
- Managing a changing revenue base

Specific public health challenges include: fundamental demographic changes in King County’s population, emerging infectious diseases, new disease interactions, the challenges of senior health and chronic disease in an aging society, at-risk children and adolescents, environmental risks, and the enormous challenge of meeting the health care needs of low-income populations for whom health care is increasingly not available.

To assure success in addressing disparities in health status and improving the overall wellness of our communities, Public Health must emphasize innovative strategies and use the latest technologies to successfully address the social determinants of health. This includes:

- Expanding interventions that specifically address social determinants of health;
- Collaborating through genuine partnerships with communities to implement these interventions; and
- Engaging communities in participatory research to evaluate these interventions.

Public Health will be most effective if it uses multiple strategies intensively and in a sustained manner. Some of these strategies are already widely in use; others will necessarily be innovations.

Our current efforts to improve and increase the health of the public have been generally successful and must be sustained. During the next five years, we must closely monitor demographic, financial, and community health outcome data in order to respond to challenges noted in this plan and other challenges that will inevitably arise. Our plan is to maintain successful approaches, but perform them in a more integrated and cost-effective manner.

In addition, we plan to enhance service provision in key areas of need, specifically chronic disease prevention, infectious disease control, and health and wellness promotion.

Additionally, business practice and management challenges include: financial systems that are not supportive of billing, contracting, and fiscal management needs as well as a management information system that is fragile and unreliable.

The next five years will require continued assessment and prioritized response to the dynamic public health needs of our region. The scope and array of Public Health programs and services matches our mission, goals, and critical health priority areas, although, in the next five years we will need to enhance health promotion activities and address emerging health issues as indicated by assessment activities.

Public Health - Seattle & King County is on course for achieving “healthy people and healthy communities.”
